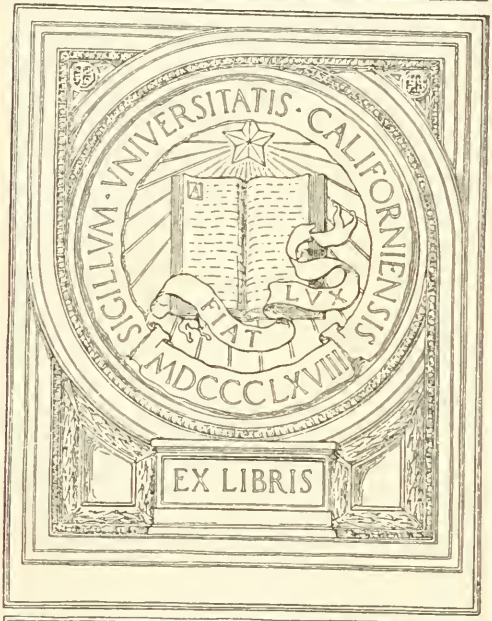
The value of the intellectual life

By

Charles William Wendte

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



EX LIBRIS

ROBERT ERNEST COWAN

The Value of the Intellectual Life

REV. CHARLES W. WENDTE

In Memoriam

JOHN H. SMYTH

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/valueofintellect00wend

SMYTH MEMORIAL WINDOW.

SUBJECT:—"INSPIRATION," ST. JOHN AT PATMOS.

The Value of the Intellectual Life

A DISCOURSE

BY

REV. CHARLES W. WENDTE

DELIVERED AT THE

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH

OAKLAND, CAL.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18th, 1892

On the subject of the Stained Glass Window placed in the Church to the memory of JOHN H. SMYTH, by his wife, S. Gertrude Smyth.

The Value of the Intellectual Life.

"And he said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful."—Rev. xxi: 5.

(Inscription on the Smyth Memorial Window.)

The purpose of my discourse this morning is to interpret to you the legend of the stained glass window which has been placed in the north front of this church, in loving memory of John H. Smyth, and to draw from it the permanent lessons of truth and beauty which it seeks to convey to our souls.

It is proper that I begin with some account of the man whom this beautiful work of Christian art commemorates.

John H. Smyth was born in 1830 in Dublin, Ireland. He came of energetic and sturdy Scotch-Irish stock. In his infancy his parents emigrated to the New World. His education was gained in Quebec, and later at the Jesuit College in Montreal, where he graduated as a student of the law. He shortly after removed to Milwaukee, where he was admitted to the bar. The talented young lawyer, full of energy and ambition, longed for a larger field for the development of his powers. Accordingly, in 1862 he came to San Francisco. Entering into a law partnership, he

COWAN LIBRARY, 1936

295587

began a successful professional career, devoting himself especially to cases involving the title and ownership of land. One of the fruits of his diligent study and legal acumen was a treatise on the law of homestead and exemption. This publication received high praise at the time of its appearance. It was the first attempt to arrange and classify this young but already huge body of law, and was a thorough and conscientious piece of work. It still remains a valuable book of reference for the legal profession.

But while Mr. Smyth attained a highly creditable standing as an attorney, and acquired a competence through the practice of his profession, his friends were wont to say of him that his analytic mind and scholarly tastes better fitted him for a professor's chair. In looking over his literary remains, I have myself been impressed with this opinion. He was a man of intellect and culture, of diligent research, and keen observing powers. He possessed a good classical training, and was acquainted with several modern languages. Some of his papers before the Berkeley Literary Club, of this city, of which he was a valued member, especially displayed his varied gifts, and exhibited no small degree of literary talent. Two of these, memorial tributes to departed members of the Club, Rev. Dr. Hamilton and Hon. John W. Dwinelle, were especially noticeable, and found their way into print. He also contributed numerous articles and reviews to the public press.

But it was the domain of Science which especially attracted and interested him. In a public lecture on The Life and Times of Galileo, first delivered in 1872, he spoke in brave and eloquent terms of

Charles Darwin, and gave thoughtful consideration to his doctrine of the Descent, or rather Ascent, of Man. He incurred no little theological odium for this utterance. Mr. Smyth was a member of the Academy of Sciences, and of the California Microscopical and Historical Societies. His most important contribution to his favorite study was a treatise on Panspermy *versus* Abiogeny, in which he discussed with much acuteness the questions attending the theory of spontaneous generation. He gives an interesting account of the researches of the eminent French scientist Pasteur in this field of investigation, and reaches, at last, the conclusion that the spontaneous generation of life has not been proven, and that the dictum, "no life without antecedent life," is firmly established by the latest researches. This essay has been preserved in pamphlet form.

In his private and domestic life Mr. Smyth was very happy. In 1867 he married Miss S. G. Beers, a student and teacher of Oberlin, Ohio, who sympathized with his intellectual tastes, and was very devoted to him. A charming trait in him was his equable and sweet temper in his home.

He was deeply interested in the political life and reform movements of his adopted country. Two of his brothers served in the Union army during the civil war, and one of them was killed on the field of battle. He himself was only restrained from a soldier's career by the necessity for one member of the family remaining at home to support it. With voice and pen he upheld the cause of human liberty and the preservation of the Union.

He was especially interested in the domestic, social

and industrial emancipation and political enfranchisement of the women of America.

In 1880, symptoms of a malady of the brain began to reveal themselves, the result of a too intense application to his business and his books. For several years he lingered at his pleasant home on San Pablo avenue, with little power of mental concentration, but enjoying the sunshine, and the trees and flowers which he had planted with loving hand. His declining years were tenderly watched over by his devoted wife. On the 22d of January, 1888, it became my mournful duty, as pastor of this church, to conduct Christian rites of burial over his grave. We laid him away in the beautiful cemetery which nestles among yonder hills that overlook our city. His body, worn and wasted, we committed to kindly mother earth, his eager, restless mind, his ardent, aspiring spirit to God who gave it.

THE VALUE OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE.

In pondering the lessons of the life of Mr. Smyth, it has seemed to me that the aspect in which he presents himself to our imagination and memory is that of the student, the scholar and thinker. It was with this conception of him in mind that the following inscription was penned for the mural tablet which is to be affixed to the wall near his window to accompany and explain it:

> In studious ways he sought, with cultured mind,
> Guided by reason's torch, justice and truth to find;
> His earnest life its faithful witness bore
> That, while he sought the truth, he loved mankind the more.

Last Sunday morning I treated of the worth and dignity of manual labor and the mechanic arts, as

illustrated in the legend of the memorial window in the west wall of the church. I took occasion at that time to utter a protest against the unlovely contempt and arrogance so often displayed toward occupations involving handwork and physical toil by our educated, professional and wealthy classes. This morning we dedicate a memorial representative to us of Intellectual Labor, of the work of the student and thinker and seer. It is no less in order for me to call your attention in turn to the lack of appreciation and disparagement which intellectual occupations so often encounter from the so-called working classes. The man who supports himself by the labor of his hands often fails to do justice to the industry and self-denial, the severe, unremitting toil of the student and professional man. He does not know in what the work of the scholar and thinker consists, and hence denounces him for his idleness or envies him his leisure and easy circumstances. Many workingmen look upon the professors at our State University, for instance, as so many drones in the social hive, supported, through a foolish deference for culture, in semi-idleness at the public expense. A few lectures weekly is all that is required of them, and these are merely an interruption of their long vacations and years of travel abroad at the cost of the State. How little do such critics understand the true nature of the scholar's vocation. They are ignorant of his faithful toil over his books or his instruments, protracted often till deep into the night. They cannot appreciate the difficult problems in language, philosophy and science that harass his mind, his arduous pursuit of truth stretching his reason till it aches, the severe discipline of mental powers

necessary for the acquisition of knowledge, or the ability to impart it to others.

"In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread" is a command honored by the brain worker quite as much as by the artisan or day laborer.

I recall coming suddenly once upon the poet preacher, Robert Collyer, as he sat at his study table, literally toiling over his Sunday sermon. His form was bent over the desk before him; his face flushed purple with intellectual strain, the veins on his forehead were swollen and knotted. "What, Robert," I cried, "so hard at work! I thought you, of all men, wrote by inspiration." "Ah, my lad, it's oftener perspiration," was the reply. No toil of the blacksmith Robert Collyer, as, in his earlier days, he hammered at his anvil, caused him such stress and pain as his labor in framing, pen in hand, those winsome sentences that charm us with their blended Anglo-Saxon strength and musical beauty. No struggle with unruly beasts refusing to be shod was so strenuous and exhausting as to restrain and concentrate the Pegasus flight of his imagination upon the serious moral purpose of his sermon. One has well said that the scholar also perspires at his task, but it is inwardly rather than outwardly. The acquirement of a clear and elegant style in writing and speaking is as laborious as the acquirement of a trade, and yet this style is only the beginning of the scholar's vocation, the tools with which he is to pursue his art as an author and a teacher. There are, indeed, indolent students, ineffective scholars who render the world but slight service; but so are there lazy workingmen, shiftless and useless followers of the mechanic arts. All high

literary and scientific culture is the product of years of unceasing toil. The scholar's task never ends, for knowledge and truth can never be exhausted. The most laborious and erudite student must confess at the last, like the profound Sir Isaac Newton, that for all his attainments, he seems to himself only a child playing by the seashore, amusing himself with finding a curious pebble or bit of shell now and then, while the great ocean of undiscovered truth stretches away before him.

But let not this confession of the limitations of human capacity and knowledge be construed into a disparagement of the work of the scholar and his value to the community. "All past history proves the immensity of the debt which the world owes to those who gave their whole time and attention to intellectual pursuits." Without Aristotle and Plato, Moses and Lycurgus, Cuvier and Darwin, Newton and Humboldt, Voltaire and Strauss, Jesus and Luther, human history would lose its brightest pages, and man still be groping in the errors and brutalities of his earlier and savage condition.

Even the Fine Arts are not the mere playthings of his leisure, but have their high mission to refine and exalt his soul, to fill his eyes with beauty and his heart with gladness. Artists like Shakspeare, Phidias, Rafael and Beethoven,—how poor the world would be without these creators of the æsthetic treasures of mankind! The humblest workingman, whose home is something more than a roof and four walls, or who reads something besides an account of a prize fight or ball match, is a debtor to art. In every graceful curve in the lines of his habitation, in every picture on its walls, in

every garment that he puts on, in every book that he reads, in every song he sings, in every spectacle he witnesses, in every sermon he hears, he renders constant, however unconscious, tribute to the value of the fine arts in human life.

Yet facility in art production is not an original gift to man, it is only to be acquired through long and persistent endeavors. The artist must enter upon a ceaseless struggle against technical difficulties. "The fine arts," says P. G. Hamerton, "offer drudgery enough and disappointment enough to be a training both in patience and humility."

"The true artist is born," we sometimes say. Assuredly, but his art is not born with him; only his artistic impulse. His native capacity is God's free gift to him, the cultivation of that capacity must be his own achievement. Only by industry and toil, by self-denial and self-discipline can he develop his gifts and make them useful to mankind. Meissonier, the eminent French artist, painted very small canvases. They were in such eager demand that you would have to cover its surface many times with gold to purchase one of them. But Meissonier's studies for each figure in his crowded pictures were painted from living models and life-size, and every tint and line in his paintings was the fruit of the most unremitting, painstaking toil.

Again, do not imagine that the literary art is the idle and easy employment of leisure hours. Nine-tenths of it is drudgery. Wordsworth, we are told, shrank from the composition of his poems much more sensitively than from his monotonous vocation as an agent for the sale of government stamps. Most poets, while they love to dream over the conception of their

poems, have a horror of the pen. To engage in the labor of actual composition requires all their moral courage and resolution; and how often are they not discouraged and disheartened when, in spite of all their faithful endeavors, their imagination and sentiment spurn the fetters of language and verse. When a poet tells you his lines cost him little or no effort, depend upon it he is not aiming at the highest in his art — the divine flame is not in him. The only poetry worth writing or reading is that which has racked one's brain, or is coined out of the agony of one's heart.

Let us then honor intellectual labor in all its forms. The lawyer who pores all day with intense mind over his briefs and law books, and takes the varying fortunes of his clients before judge and jury home with him to ponder in the still night-watches; the doctor, whose anxious thought is concerned with the recovery of his patients, and the fearful issues of life and death that so often depend upon his skill and faithfulness; the business man, carrying in his mind the infinite ramification and detail of a large mercantile or manufacturing establishment — are not these workmen, who need not to be ashamed, faithful toilers for the upbuilding of the world in health and wealth, truth and knowledge, grace and goodness?

Men do not appreciate this as they should. When I visited a German relation of mine, years ago, and told him that I was about to study for the ministry, he exclaimed, with sincere regret, "O, why could n't you have chosen something useful?" I might have answered him with the words of Jesus: "Man cannot live by bread alone." Nay, nor by the sharpened intelligence that furnishes him with

bread. The minister, if he be true to his calling, is no idler. He has it within possibility to be one of the most useful men in the community. To study not only books, but human nature, not only theology, but all arts and knowledges that enrich and adorn human life; to preach and teach, to comfort and inspire, to lend a hand and lead, to seek for truth and rebuke unrighteousness, to try and make himself a better man for his own and his brethren's sake—here is work enough to do, to confute the vulgar notion that he does not *earn* the bread he eats.

The workingman toils hard and for a modest income (with all my heart I pray for its large increase), but when his eight or ten hours' stint is done his toil is over, his mind is free from care, he is his own master, and can give himself to whatever pursuit or pleasure he will. The work of a pastor, a doctor, a business man or lawyer is never done. His cares follow him into his home, they haunt his pillow, they pursue him on his vacations, until he looks with envy upon the brawn and muscle, the healthy appetite and sweet sleep of the toiler at forge or bench or plow.

How wrong, then, are the popular cavils and slurs upon intellectual labor! Not only is it equal in severity and hardship to manual toil, but in its productive results upon human welfare and happiness it is of equal if not superior importance to the so-called industrial occupations of man. "Of all the toils," says Philip Hamerton, "in which men engage, none are nobler in their origin or their aim than those by which they endeavor to become more wise." Any jealousy and disparagement on the part of these two classes in human society, the brain-workers and the

hand-workers, is unwise and unjust. Each needs the other. Each should respect and honor the other. Such is the teaching of the New Testament. "For now are there many members, yet but one body; and the eye cannot say unto the hand, 'I have no need of thee,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' . . . There should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored all the members rejoice with it. . . . But covet earnestly the best gifts." Thus the Gospel teaches the equal right and honor of all labor, whether the hand or brain is predominently employed in it. No honest work is disgraceful to man, whatever it be. It is not his particular vocation, but the manner in which he pursues it, that makes it honorable or dishonorable.

Yet we are to "covet the best gifts," for while it is apparent that all kinds of work may be equally honorable, so far as individual character and merit are concerned, not every occupation is of equal value to the community and the welfare of man in general. The toil of a road-mender or trench-digger, however faithfully performed, can never be as great a contribution to the welfare of his country or his kind as that of a great jurist, or poet, or thinker. One Edison is worth more than a million Chinese coolies to the world. A George William Curtis, dedicating his great brain and heart to the upbuilding of true political and social ideals among his countrymen, is worth more to American civilization than a hundred thousand foreign-born voters in New York, whose influence and ballot are devoted to overthrowing them. While there

exists in mankind this native disparity of intellectual and moral endowment there can be no absolute equality among men. The rewards for labor may be more equitably adjusted, and manual toil receive a larger share of the world's goods and opportunities. This seems to have been in Jesus' thought also, for in his parable of the talents, he who had received the ten and he who had received the five talents were promised the same reward—the joy of their Lord. But no human adjustment of compensation for labor can ever remove native differences of endowment or make one occupation equal to another in importance to mankind. Even if the Socialistic philosophy were to be put into practice, and, through governmental compulsion, every worker, whether with brain or hand, be equally compensated, still intellectual and moral superiority would make itself felt, and those vocations which exercised the most wide-reaching influence on human affairs would receive the greatest consideration and dignity,—would be most admired, sought after and rewarded with social distinction. This would be the more true if those who pursued them were inspired, as they should be, by a lofty sense of moral obligation to their Creator and their kind, and, remembering that from those who have received much, much is required, dedicated their exceptional gifts and opportunities to the service of the common brotherhood.

The window which has been set in yonder wall to commemorate a departed student and professional man, represents to us the value and dignity of intellectual labor.

But all high forms of intellectual activity involve a corresponding moral endeavor. In them the human

mind becomes conscious of its larger and spiritual relations, its kinship with the Eternal and Divine. This loftier exercise of the intellectual faculties in man we call Inspiration, and it is this great spiritual fact which our window symbolizes and glorifies. In a central circular panel is displayed upon a pearly background, patterned after the mosaics of ancient Byzantine art, the seated figure of St. John, the Seer of Patmos. His red prophetic mantle envelops him. In one hand he holds, unrolled, the scroll of revelation, in the other an uplifted pen. His face, swept by his venerable and flowing beard, is upturned to heaven, with a listening and rapt expression. The whole attitude of the figure is one of the most eager, intense expectancy. Above is inscribed the injunction from the Apocalypse : "And He said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Revelations, xxi, 5.) Eight panels surround the central opening, and are filled with representations of flowers and fruit employed in Christian symbolism, the lily, the passion-flower, the pomegranate and the vine. These panels are further connected with the central picture by a circle of cherubic and winged heads which surrounds it.

Inspiration is the theme of this beautiful work of Christian art. But, remember, inspiration is not an absolutely free gift of God, disassociated from all human effort. It presupposes, not a passive and perceptive, but an active and responsive condition of the mind. These two must co-operate—the purpose of God and the will of man, the influx of the divine spirit and the open and eager mind that yearns to receive it.

295587

In even the most usual exercise of the thinking powers the mind can act only as it is quickened from above. How much greater, then, is its obligation to divine impulses when it is concerned with the profounder problems of human investigation! The holy spirit of God is to the mind what light is to the eye. Its office is not to impart truth, but to show it; to so awaken the intelligence and kindle the moral and spiritual nature of man that he may see the truth, love the good and do the right; that with fear and trembling he may work out his own salvation, and yet know that it is God who worketh in him to do His will and pleasure.

Inspiration comes to men in different forms, according to the character of their seeking. Moses and Gladstone are inspired to make laws, the Psalmist to pour out his soul in song, Plato and Emerson to impart wisdom, Isaiah and Wendell Phillips to utter prophecies, Luther and Channing to free the soul of man, Raphael and Mozart to breathe beauty into the sordid world, Jesus to lift it by his cross towards heaven and God. And not only these crowned spirits of the race—every honest thought, however humble, every loving deed, every unselfish prayer, from the lowliest as well as the highest-placed among men, has its Godward side. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit, diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all."

But this implies that man must do his part, the human intelligence and will must co-operate with the Divine Purpose. Then truly the voice is heard from heaven: "Write, for my words are true and faithful!" then a great conviction seizes upon each faithful

servant of the Most High, whatever his gift or station: then the mind is clear, the heart enlarged, truth is seen at first hand, right is second nature, and God is all in all.

To this highest form of the intellectual life our window is dedicated. As from Sunday to Sunday it lends its beauty to our service, may its legend and lesson sink deep into our hearts, encouraging us with the reminder that the Divine inspiration is continuous and universal. It quickens the thought and nerves the will of men to-day as truly as in ancient and Bible times. It is ours in fullness proportioned to our obedience and trust, and we may sing with grateful confidence in the Divine Presence and Communication, the inspired hymn of Whittier:

All souls that struggle and aspire,
  All hearts of prayer by thee are lit;
And, dim or clear, thy tongues of fire
  On dusky tribes and centuries sit.

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed thou knowest;
  Wide as our need thy favors fall;
The white wings of the Holy Ghost
  Stoop, unseen, o'er the heads of all.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below

LD-URL APR 16 1965

RECEIVED
MAIN LOAN DESK
APR 5 1965
A.M. 7|8|9|10|11|12|1|2|3|4|5|6 P.M.

LD-URL SEP 19 1966

RENEWAL OCT 10 1966

RECD LD-URL SEP 9 '66

Form L-9
25m-10,'41(2191)

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT
LOS ANGELES
LIBRARY

AA 000 661 702

PLEASE DO NOT REMOV
THIS BOOK CARD

THE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES

University Research Library

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

IBM L 30202

AUTHOR